

## PLAN OF THE CITY TO ATTACK POVERTY AT ITS FOUNDATION

Alexander M. Wilson, New Head of Municipal Bureau of Social Research,  
Outlines Proposed Method of Going Deeper Into  
Problem Than Mere Relief Work



The farm colony on Staten Island.

NEW YORK has a new secretary of its Municipal Bureau of Social Investigation, and his name is Alexander M. Wilson. He was born in Newcastle, Pa., in 1873 and was graduated from Princeton University with the class of '97. While in Princeton he distinguished himself in high jumping, wherefore he made the varsity track team.

Now he has leaped again—this time into the job of looking after Father Knickerbocker's unfortunates who need help sorely at times—and henceforth his job and that of his assistants will be to find means whereby dire poverty will be accompanied by less distress and mental anguish than in the past.

For a long time New York city has had a Department of Charities, which has been looking after the sick and needy in an official way with results that were not fruitless by any means. Yet, of recent years, other cities have sounded a new note in this kind of work. They have gone ahead on the assumption that a municipality is not doing its full duty by any means when it merely cares for a sick parent or helpless child temporarily, in a hospital or an asylum; that it has much more to do than merely providing a few nights shelter and a few meals for the man or the woman who is down and out and on the streets.

New York at last has decided to enter upon this broad, humanitarian policy. Each year it receives applications for help to the number of not less than 150,000. It has been doing all it could do under the old system. Now, it is expected, much more will be accomplished. Of this great army of unfortunates the Bureau of Social Investigation has about 17,000 persons to look after who are inmates of hospitals, almshouses, infirmaries for the aged and sick, the crippled, the deaf and the blind, and others who are in some form or another physically or mentally unbalanced. The institutions for vagrants and for mentally defective children also are included in the Department of Charities. In addition to these public institutions the city cares for a large number of dependents at various private institutions. In fact New York spends more than \$5,000,000 a year for the care and custody of various groups of unfortunates in these private institutions. The Department of Charities is striving to compel private institutions which receive money from the city to live up to the same high standards and ideals which it is endeavoring to set for its own institutions.

Following are some of the reasons urged in favor of the organization of the new social service work. First, that the city may extend its work of rehabilitation to families as well as to individuals. Heretofore the city has looked at the problem of poverty entirely on the basis of the individual unit rather than the family unit. If the city found a man suffering from tuberculosis, for example, it perfunctorily committed him to a hospital, or a sanitarium without regard to what became of the rest of the family.

The basic idea behind the new bureau of investigation is not to confine its help to the individual unit but to look at the problem of poverty from the standpoint of the whole family. A second important reason for the establishment of the bureau of social investigation is that the Department of Charities may have definite machinery with which to carry on preventive as well as palliative work. When Mayor Mitchell appointed John Kingsbury as Commissioner of Charities he expressly directed that Mr. Kingsbury should turn his efforts not only toward the relief of the distressed poor but toward an investigation of the causes and conditions which create poverty, and so far as possible toward the elimination and prevention of those conditions. The Bureau of Social Investigation

will endeavor in each case to discover the underlying reasons behind poverty and destitution wherever possible, and will attempt to remove the cause. If the cause is sickness it will seek to provide the necessary medical treatment or hospital care. If the cause is unemployment it will seek through existing channels to find the necessary work. If the cause is desertion or abandonment an effort will be made through every possible channel to find the deserter and compel him to resume his responsibility. So far as possible the bureau will aim to keep families together rather than to have them broken up.

The third reason for the establishment of the bureau is to protect the city from impostors and to stop the practice of filling up private and public institutions at the city's expense with persons who are not properly entitled to public charities.

The various kinds of social investigations which will be taken up by the new bureau, with the numerical importance of each as shown by the statistics of 1914, are as follows: Families applying for the commitment of children to private institutions 9,319; Children involved with the institution 18,083; Reinvestigation of children in private institutions 27,311; Applications for discharge of children from private institutions 2,781; Applications for examination in clearing house for mental defects 7,462; Applications for admission to tuberculosis hospitals, etc. 15,731; Applications for patients in private hospitals 62,523; Transfers to State institutions 321; Non-residents transported 137; Application in private proceedings 14,800; Application in non-support proceedings 2,295; Application in paternity proceedings 1,049; Admission to city hospitals 41,992; Admission to city homes 6,781.

"The Department of Charities," said Mr. Wilson, "for a long time has had the function of investigating children who are placed in institutions and orphan asylums paid for by the city. It is responsible both for the board of these children in the institution and for the decision as to whether a child shall be removed from its own home and placed in an institution."

"This function has been performed through a special bureau for dependent children, whose visitors, in making their investigations, are now concerned primarily with the question as to whether the family could provide for the children at home. Similarly the Department of Charities has to determine whether a patient should be received in any of the private hospitals paid for by the city, or should be accepted as city charges."

"Here again is a separate set of visitors representing the city in making these investigations. Formerly the concern of these visitors was primarily to pass upon the condition presented by the sick person who needed hospital care. The two types of investigations might have been made for the same family by two different investigators within a very short time; yet the facts ascertained in one investigation were not available for the other without considerable difficulty."

"In the same way the city helps the adult blind, the veterans of the civil war and of the Spanish-American war, and it attempts to settle unhappy domestic relations before they go before the courts. In each of these cases there must be an investigation of conditions in the home to determine the line of action that is to be taken. Early in the present year the city of New York decided to consolidate all these types of investigation under one body, so as to prevent waste of time and energy in investigating each type of need that might develop. The investigator to-day considers any problem of poverty that has brought the applicant to the city for public help, and various types of investigations have been merged into one.

"This means a broader outlook on the part of the city's officials, and it means correspondingly larger service to the needy family; for no longer does the visitor see merely one type of distress, but through his familiarity with other problems he learns to view the family as a whole and considers an immediate application for public help in its relation to the whole family problem that is presented."

"Sometimes the application may be for the admission of a child to an institution, when in reality hospital care for one of the parents would permanently obviate the need of breaking up the family by separating from it one of the children."

"It is the duty of the investigator under the new bureau of social investigation not only to prevent the abuse of the city's institutions but to save the family from the necessity of having any member go to a public institution for a short or a long stay. The public relief officials have had the habit of merely doing or refusing to do the particular thing requested of them. The new spirit encouraged by the staff of social investigators is that the real needs of the whole family are to be met."

"The net result of this kind of social work among the applicants for the city's assistance should be a lessening of the number of dependents accepted for public care and a very great stimulus to prevent agencies engaged in charitable work from overlapping each other and furnishing duplicate relief."

"Records of the dependent families have been compiled, making it possible now to analyze the problems of poverty presented to the city for treatment with some hope of getting back to the causes that induced this poverty. In New York there are more than 150,000 applications for public relief in the course of the year. The obtaining of reliable data on wages, rent, housing conditions, working conditions and other factors in this great multitude of people who have fallen behind in the economic race should lead to constructive proposals for the prevention of such forms of poverty as are preventable. Here is a respite of statistical information of great significance that has never been tapped."

### Vagrants and homeless men at work.

Whether we like it or not, social legislation is assuming a place of first importance in every Legislature in every State of the Union, and city after city is organizing its social welfare activities with a proper recognition of its importance to the people.

"In fact, beginning with Kansas City four or five years ago, half a dozen large cities in the country, including Cleveland, have in their new charters definitely set apart social activities of the community, and grouped them under a department called the Department of Social Welfare."

"The same spirit that has prevailed in social welfare in other cities has created in New York the organization of its bureau of social investigation, so that to-day New York has a staff of 121 social investigators, who are going in and out of the homes of the poor of the city, representing to our less fortunate neighbors not only shelter, food and medical care, but also the heart and conscience of this great municipality."

The man at the head of the bureau of social investigation comes to New York after having had wide experience in his field. Upon being graduated from Princeton he taught Latin and mathematics in a large school in Connecticut, then served in this city in the maintenance of way department of the New York Central Railroad. He spent a year in Batavia, and taught in the Pingree School at Elizabeth, N. J., where he met William H. Allen, who persuaded him that one of the great needs of the country was for men trained in social service work and competent to do it.

After some months of enthusiastic missionary work Mr. Allen persuaded Mr. Wilson to quit teaching as a profession and take up social service; whereupon Mr. Wilson entered the New York School of Philanthropy as a student. Upon leaving it in the autumn of 1903 he found a position waiting for him in Jersey City. He spent a year there as secretary of the Organized Charities, when he was called to Boston, being the second executive in the United States to engage in the newly organized fight against tuberculosis.

He was active in the Massachusetts campaign which secured legislation providing for public hospitals and sanatoria for tuberculosis patients, as well as in the campaign of education regarding tuberculosis which was carried on by the Boston Association for Relief and Control of that disease.

At the end of three years he went to Chicago as secretary of the Chicago Tuberculosis Institute, an organization of the same type as that with which he had served in Boston. A year later Ernest P. Ricknell resigned as superintendent of the Chicago Bureau of Charities to become national director of the Red Cross Society, and Mr. Wilson succeeded him, but with the understanding that he could work for the consolidation of the Bureau of Charities with the Chicago Relief and Aid Society, which was started at the time of the great Chicago fire. Mr. Wilson foreseeing results that would follow such consolidation, two years were expected to elapse before this consolidation could take place, but it was accomplished in less than one year.

In accordance with his original understanding Mr. Wilson resigned as soon as the two bodies were merged into what is now called the United Charities of Chicago, this in the spring of 1909. He at once returned to Boston and again took up his work with the Association for the Relief and Control of Tuberculosis, but a year later was called to Philadelphia by the Henry Phelps Institute for the Study and Treatment of Tuberculosis, which had just been taken over by the University of Pennsylvania.

To this he devoted himself from 1910 until Rudolph Blankenburg was elected Mayor of Philadelphia, when Mr. Wilson was appointed assistant director of the Department of Public Health and Charities, where he remained for three and a half years. From that position Father Knickerbocker invited him to a larger and more difficult task, as secretary of the Bureau of Social Investigation here in New York, and he took hold of the job a few days ago.

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\$2.00 Sport Hats, 49c.  
About 500 of these combinations of felt and straw and straw facing in beautiful light colors.

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White satin Hats and black velvet Hats, simply trimmed, jaunty Turbans with flowers; veiled satin and velvet Sailors. Especially smart for Summer wear.  
Panama Hat Bands, plain and college colors, at 19c., 29c. and 39c. 75c. Imported Millinery Flowers, 39c. Clusters of roses, daisies, poppies, gardenias, etc. Street Floor, Center, Central Building.

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Dainty floral designs in fine quality Plisse Crepe, pretty and attractive for Summer Dresses; 27 inches wide.

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Fine quality Percaloe in neat figured effects on light and dark color grounds. Just the fabric for shirts, house wear and boys' blouses; 36 inches wide.

Flowered Dress Chintz, 16c. Yd.  
Attractive designs in this favored fabric for children's dresses and sport wear for grownup folk; 36 inches wide.

Floral Dress Crepe, 5c. a Yard.  
Pretty designs in flowered Crepes in large and small floral effects on white ground; 27 inches wide.

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White cotton gabardine and Palm Beach cloth in natural or pastel color; also navy or black with white pin stripes. There are fifteen distinctive styles for outing or dress wear, all tailored in the finest fashion. Sizes 32 to 44 inclusive. Second Floor, Central Building.

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INCLUDING FINE CHECKS, serges, gabardines, made with mannish sack coats, sport models, dressy short coats. Mostly one or two of a kind. The best of the season's styles. Sizes mostly 16 and 18 years. A few 14s.

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Ginghams, percales, all of our old Dresses of which size range has been broken. Sizes of 14 years. Second Floor, Central Building.

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THEY ARE MADE in hip length model, easily adaptable to all figures. Belt forms fancy buckle effect in back and ties softly in front. Deep collar and cuffs. Button trimmed. The kind of a summer coat you really need and will be able to wear at this price. Sizes 34 to 44.  
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Of line and linen. Of Brighton and Palm Beach cloth. Second Floor, Central Building.